

Narrator:

Janet Cronick is the owner of Ultimate Gifts, a promotional products company that helps clients enhance their brands through the use of promotional ideas. Cronick travels often to Latin America to share her experience as a Latina entrepreneur with various businesswomen organizations, national universities and local microenterprises.

Cronick participated in Pathways to Prosperity, a women entrepreneurs' conference in Washington on October 9th, 2009. She talked with us about some key issues that women face as entrepreneurs.

Janet Cronick:

Women's issues is not just in North America, it's really throughout the world. I personally have been part of starting an organization in Orange County, in California. I'm co-founder of the National Latina Businesswomen Association of Orange County and people ask me the same question - why did you guys start an organization specifically for women? And one of the things that we tell people is it's different when you have the support of your peers and not because you feel that, you know, you're a victim. I think that's where it needs to start - you can't think of yourselves as a victim. But, you know, realistically, we do face issues. You know, we need to establish that credibility. Historically, if a man starts a business, it is easier for them to say, well, this is a "business-MAN." You know, the term "business-WOMAN" - think about it - it's normal. Twenty, twenty-five years ago, "business woman" - it was a new term in our vocabulary. So I think we are making progress. We're definitely not there yet, but I think we have made some positive changes, and that's what we have shared here with the women that have attended the conference from Latin America.

You know, it's funny because the same issues resonate, whether it's Latin America or here in the U.S., we pretty much face the same issues. Some of the common themes are access to capital, obviously; when they're starting a business or wanting to grow a business, access to capital is usually the number one concern. Technical assistance - how to write a business plan - a lot of times, not just in Latin America, even here in the U.S., people go into business without planning it. And that's an issue that I personally talk about during my workshops when I travel. We need to take the time to plan. One of the things I see when people tell me, well, here we start businesses because it's a need, not because it's a luxury. And I say I understand that but keep in mind that most businesses fail because they lacked a plan, and if you take the time to do a little market research whether your product is needed, whether there is a market for your products, then I think you have a better chance.

So you know it is a struggle, but one step at a time, sharing my experience with them and letting them know that we face the same struggles that they face, whether it's Colombia, Bogota, Argentina, Dominican Republic, whatever it may be. We pretty much face the same issues here, here in the U.S. as well.

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